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SUBJECT: Ambassador's Visit to Tromso and Participation in the Arctic Frontiers Conference

¶11. (U) Summary: In his first visit to Tromso, the Ambassador gave a well-received presentation on U.S. Arctic policy, and met with the head of the Arctic Council Secretariat, local government officials, Tromso University representatives, a satellite services company, the leader of a global reindeer herders' association, and a group of U.S. Fulbright scholars studying in Tromso. Speeches by Russian and Chinese officials stressed interest in cooperation in Arctic affairs, with the Chinese official's implied criticism of the United States for not joining the Law of the Sea Convention. Press coverage of the Ambassador was largely favorable. End Summary.

U.S., Russian and Chinese Speakers on Arctic Cooperation

¶12. (U) The Arctic Frontiers network holds an annual conference in Tromso, Norway to bring together policymakers, government officials, industry representatives, regional interest groups, top scientists, and NGOs from the Arctic nations as well as from other interested countries. The theme of this year's fourth Arctic Frontiers conference held January 24 - 29 was "Living in the High North." In addition to Ambassador White, key speakers included Erik Lahnstein, Deputy Minister Foreign Affairs, Norway; Tang Guoqiang, Chinese Ambassador to Norway; and Maxim Travnikov, Deputy Minister, Ministry for Regional Development. Senator Mark Begich (D-Alaska) recorded remarks for the conference, but did not attend.

¶13. (U) United States: On January 25, the Ambassador delivered a well-received speech emphasizing the strong multilateral and bilateral relationships in the Arctic region, where cooperation, not conflict, is the norm. The United States has a strong interest in Arctic issues and is working with other members of the Arctic Council to ensure developments in the Arctic do not harm the fragile ecological environment. In response to a follow-up question on U.S. accession to the Law of the Sea Convention, the Ambassador related the strong support of the Obama Administration and its predecessors in joining the Convention, while noting the uncertainties surrounding the process of U.S. Senate ratification.

¶14. (U) Senator Begich's recorded remarks mentioned his experience as Mayor of Anchorage, and his cooperation with Tromso, a sister city. He emphasized the problems posed by climate change in Alaska and discussed draft legislation to promote infrastructure development in Alaska.

¶ 15. (U) Norway: In the wake of the last-minute cancellation by Norwegian Fisheries and Coastal Affairs Minister Lisbeth Berg-Hansen, the GON did not have Minister-level participation in the Conference. Erik Lahnstein, Norway's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, became the GON's keynote speaker. Lahnstein's remarks highlighted the international legal framework for the Arctic, the need for peace and stability in the region, support for the Arctic Council, the need for integrated ocean management and cooperation on fisheries. At a separate session on January 26, Statoil's Hege Marie Norheim discussed the majority state-owned firm's strong investments in technology to protect the environment and Norway's fisheries in connection with opening new offshore acreage to oil exploration and production.

¶ 16. (U) China: In his presentation to the Conference that same morning, Chinese Ambassador Tang Guoqiang stressed China's interest in Arctic affairs, including the impact of climate change on Chinese sustainable development and China's contributions to Arctic research. Tang noted China's ratification/accession to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol and its efforts to control greenhouse gas emissions. Recalling China's participation in the Arctic Council as an ad hoc observer, Tang called on the Council to take a decision on acceptance of new observers. He also called for wider involvement (e.g. inclusion of China) in the Arctic Council's work on search and rescue and other shipping-related matters. The Chinese Ambassador listed international treaties that provided the basic legal framework for

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addressing Arctic affairs, beginning with the Law of the Sea Convention (which one observer later characterized for the local press as a dig at the United States, which has not ratified the Convention).

¶ 17. (U) Russia: Maxim Travnikov, Russian Deputy Minister for Regional Development, stressed his nation's interest in the Arctic and in cooperation with neighboring countries and non-governmental stakeholders. He noted that the Russian Federation's Arctic regions accounted for little more than one percent of the population, but more than 12 percent of national income and over 20 percent of exports. Environmental protection and attention to the development needs of indigenous peoples are key issues for the GOR.

¶ 18. (U) Many of these presentations can be downloaded at the Arctic Frontiers website: <http://www.arctic-frontiers.com>

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¶ 19. (U) Ambassador White's speech garnered favorable coverage in the local press, which interpreted his remarks and his visit to Tromso as a sign of continued U.S. interest in cooperation in the region. In remarks at the Conference banquet on January 26, retired Ambassador and former UN official Hans Connell praised the United States, Russia and China for their engagement and cooperation on Arctic issues.

Arctic Council Secretariat

¶ 10. (SBU) In a January 26 meeting, Arctic Council (AC) Secretariat Leader Nina Buvang Vaaja described the AC's work and plans. Vaaja comes from a position in the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Section for the High North, Resources and Russia. Vaaja noted that the Tromso-based Secretariat is not permanent, and that a decision on whether to make it permanent will be taken at the end of the

Swedish Chairmanship of the AC in 2013. She noted that Canada, which will take the chair in 2013, is thus far cool to the idea of a permanent Secretariat in Tromso. Norway is fully funding the AC Secretariat's 3-4 million NOK budget (approximately USD 600,000). AC is a "decision-shaping" rather than a "decision-making" body. The GON is not interested in turning the AC into a full-fledged international organization, but wants to ensure that it is the "relevant forum" on the Arctic.

¶11. (SBU) Vaaja also highlighted the need to find a resolution on applications for permanent observer status from China, the European Commission and others. In the past, ad hoc observers had been routinely approved as permanent observers, but this practice ceased at the 2009 AC Ministerial given the increasing number and geographical diversity of observers (ranging as far as Argentina, which requested observer status based on its role in Antarctica). She told the Ambassador China was keenly interested in joining the Russia-U.S. co-chaired search and rescue task force, but that the GOR was firmly (though not openly) opposed to China's request.

¶12. (U) The next Ministerial will be hosted in Greenland by Denmark in April 2011. May 2010 will mark the first Arctic Council meeting of deputy ministers in Copenhagen.

Other Meetings

¶13. (U) Association of World Reindeer Herders: On January 25, Anders Oskdal, Executive Director of the International Center for Reindeer Husbandry briefed the Ambassador on the Center, which works with over 20 indigenous peoples in 9 Arctic countries, including the Inuit reindeer herding communities in Alaska. These

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peoples are now facing profound and rapid changes and challenges of globalization, including climate change, loss of pastures/ land use change, as well as societal changes. The Center has an ongoing project in the Arctic Council addressing the challenges of adaptation to climate change and land use change in circumpolar reindeer herding societies, including in Alaska. The Association of World Reindeer Herders is an official observer organization of the Arctic Council, and they do valuable work within the Sustainable Development Working Group (SDWG) of the Council.

¶14. (U) Oskdal also related the history of the emigration of S????mi reindeer herders from Kautokeino, Norway in 1894-1898. Nearly 1/5 of that reindeer herding community emigrated to Alaska with the support of the U.S. Government, building up the world's largest reindeer husbandry for a time in collaboration with the Inuit. The Reindeer Husbandry Center seeks to strengthen and develop ties with Alaska. Oskdal is interested in organizing a workshop in Alaska and perhaps applying for USG financial support, but he did not give us a detailed description of his project. He invited the Ambassador to visit his center in the Norwegian county of Finnmark. In a separate meeting on the margins of the conference, Laila Susanne Vars, Vice President of the Sami Parliament, also invited the Ambassador to visit the Parliament in Karasjok, in Finnmark.

Other Meetings

¶15. (U) Governor and Mayor: In separate meetings on January 25 and 26, the Ambassador discussed challenges and opportunities facing the county and city with Troms County Governor Svein Ludvigsen and

Tromso Mayor Arild Hausberg. Among the issues discussed were Tromso's strengths as a center of knowledge and education thanks to the University of Tromso.

¶16. (U) University of Tromso: The Ambassador met with Rector Jarle Aarbakke, Curt Rice, VP for Research, Hospital Director Tor Ingebrigtsen and Center for Telemedicine Director Toralf Hasvold on January 25 for a presentation on the university and a discussion of the challenges involved in increasing student exchanges and study in the United States for Norwegians. Ingebrigtsen provided the Ambassador with a tour of the University Hospital, and Hasvold demonstrated the University's telemedicine capabilities. There was keen interest in additional collaboration with U.S. researchers and educational institutions, including contact with Embassy Science Fellows.

¶17. (U) Kongsberg Satellite Services (KSAT): On January 26, Arnulf Kjeldsen, KSAT Vice President for Technical Systems, and Jan Petter Pedersen, Vice President for Products and Services, briefed the Ambassador and Emboffs on the company's services. Its best-known satellite station, SvalSat, based on an ice plateau in Svalbard, was built as a result of cooperation between NASA and the Norwegian Space Center. KSAT provides services based on data from polar orbiting satellites. In addition to Svalbard, the company currently operates ground stations in Tromso, Grimstad, and the Antarctic. The head office of KSAT is located in Troms????, and employs 52 of the 67 employees at KSAT. The remaining 15 are located at the SvalSat ground station. The Norwegian Space Centre and Kongsberg Defence & Aerospace own KSAT on a 50/50 basis.

About 30 percent of the company's revenue comes from U.S. clients.

¶18. (U) Polar Institute: Meeting on January 26, Polar Institute Director Jan-Gunnar Winther highlighted U.S. - Norwegian collaboration in research in both polar regions, including work with NASA, the National Science Foundation and the University of Alaska at Fairbanks. Scientists from the United States, as well as from 14 other nations, work at the Polar Institute. The Institute reports to the Norwegian Ministry of the Environment . The Institute employs 110 persons (divided between the Institute in Troms????, Svalbard and Dronning Maud Land in Antarctica), and activities are concentrated on environmental management, global climate,

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long-range transported pollution, the effect of pollutants on the environment, biodiversity and topographical mapping of the regions and environmental collaboration in the Barents Region. The Institute equips and organizes expeditions to both poles, owns the research vessel "Lance ". Winther provided us with a copy of his Institute's report on melting snow and ice, commissioned by former Vice President Gore and Norwegian FM Store.

¶19. (U) American Fulbright Scholars and other U.S. academics: At the close of his visit, the Ambassador met with Fulbright scholars studying Arctic and climate issues as well as American citizens who are permanent academic staff at the University of Tromso.

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